

Studio 54: Meet Jodie Meeks

By **Jason King**, Yahoo! Sports

6 hours, 23 minutes ago



Kentucky's Jodie Meeks works the ball against Tennessee's Bobby Maze en route to scoring 54 against the Volunteers on Jan. 13 in Knoxville.

(AP Photo/Wade Payne)

Meeks' greatest hits

Jodie Meeks broke Kentucky legend Dan Issel's single-game scoring record by striking for 54 points in a win over Tennessee. Here are some of Meeks' other scoring outbursts this season:

Points	Date	Opponent
39	Nov. 14	VMI
37	Nov. 29	Kansas State
46	Dec. 20	Appalachian State
32	Dec. 22	Tennessee State
54	Jan. 13	Tennessee
31	Jan. 21	Auburn

More Kentucky coverage: CatsPause.com

LEXINGTON, Ky. – For the Kentucky students enrolled in Consumer Behavior 310, the first assignment of the spring semester was simple: Introduce yourself. Tell the class where you're from, and reveal an interesting fact or two.

Jodie Meeks could've saved his breath.

"I said my name," Meeks says, "and everyone started clapping. It was a little embarrassing. I guess they already knew who I was."

One week after scoring a school-record 54 points in Kentucky's victory at Tennessee, Meeks is finally beginning to grasp the magnitude of his accomplishment.

Television analysts are hyping him as a national player of the year candidate, classmates ask for his autograph as he walks through campus and NBA scouts are dissecting every dribble, shot and facial expression.

It's all been a bit overwhelming for Meeks, who finally caught a break Monday when the university closed to observe Martin Luther King Day.

"I slept until 12:30," Meeks says. "It's been a crazy week."

More like a crazy season.

Impressive as last week's feat may have been, Meeks' 54-point effort was merely the cherry on top of what's been an All-American-type year for the junior guard.

Meeks – who missed all but 11 games last season because of a sports hernia – is averaging 26 points a game for the 15-4 Wildcats, who improved to 4-0 in the SEC with Wednesday's victory over Auburn.

Meeks scored 46 in a win over Appalachian State last month and has eclipsed the 30-point plateau six times. The 54 points he dropped on Tennessee were the most by a Division I player in a regulation game in the past 10 years.

"I still can't get over it," Kentucky coach Billy Gillispie says. "It was one of the most unbelievable things I've ever seen."

"Unbelievable." The people closest to Jodie Meeks can't help but smile when they hear that word. Folks may not have guessed he would break Dan Issel's Kentucky scoring mark, but Meeks' Millennium Falcon-blast to the top of the college basketball world has hardly surprised those who know him best.

Orestes Meeks, Jodie's father, says he'll never forget his son's reaction after reading the preseason basketball magazines that predicted Kentucky would fail to reach the NCAA tournament because its roster featured just one good player in

forward Patrick Patterson.

"Dad," Meeks told his father, "I think they forgot about me."

Orestes smiles.

"That's what makes this so special," he says. "People have doubted and overlooked Jodie his whole career. For him, this is validation."

More than a week has passed since Meeks broke Issel's record, and the folks at Norcross High School near Atlanta still haven't figured out what's wrong with their electronic marquee.

Kirk Barton, the athletic director at Meeks' alma mater, hoped to commemorate the historic performance by displaying a message that would've been seen by every person who drove past the campus. "Congratulations Jodie Meeks: 54 points – A New Kentucky Record!"

Barton shakes his head.

"For some reason, I can't get the darn thing to work," he says.

Thoughtful as the gesture would've been, it's not as if people in Norcross are oblivious to Meeks' accomplishment. The morning after the game, varsity basketball coach Jesse McMillan walked into the locker room and found a gaggle of his players hovered around a television set as Meeks' highlights played on SportsCenter.

"Jodie's making it rain!" a kid says after Meeks swished one of his 10 three-pointers. "He's droppin' bombs on 'em!"

Most of the players were still in junior high during Meeks' prep career. Still, they all feel as if they know him. Meeks, after all, has remained a familiar face at Norcross, where he spent much of last summer enhancing the skills that have made him into one of the nation's top guards.

"I'd come in during the summer to do some work, and he'd be in here shooting, all by himself," says McMillan, who was an assistant during Meeks' days.

"Before he left each day, he'd stop by my office to say goodbye. He'd stand there in the doorway, and his sweat would be dripping all over the floor."



(AP Photo/John Curry)

Kentucky's Jodie Meeks and Patrick Patterson (54) celebrate a Kentucky win.

Meeks knew he'd have to work extra-hard during the offseason. The graduation of leading scorers Joe Crawford and Ramel Bradley meant that Meeks and Patterson would have to pick up the bulk of Kentucky's scoring load in 2008-09.

That kind of pressure could be taxing on any player, but it seemed like an especially big load for Meeks, who averaged just 8.7 points as a freshman.

"In the preseason everyone was saying I was the face of Kentucky basketball," says Patterson, Meeks' roommate and a surefire NBA draft pick either this year or next.

"It was Patrick Patterson this and Patrick Patterson that. I can see how it frustrated him, because he was in the shadow. It obviously put a chip on his shoulder. He was like, 'Hey, I'm still here.'"

The 6-foot-4 Meeks has grown used to feeling ignored.

Former Norcross stars Gani Lawal (who now plays for Georgia Tech) and Al-Farooq Aminu (Wake Forest) were crowned Georgia High School Player of the Year in 2007 and 2008, respectively. Meeks, however, was passed over for the honor as a senior in 2006.

That same season, Meeks experienced another letdown as he watched the McDonald's All-American selection show. His name was never called.

"I felt like I should've been picked," Meeks says, "but there was never a time when I pouted or felt jealous. I just used it to make me stronger."

Meeks crosses his arms and leans back in his chair.

"If it wasn't for situations like that, I wouldn't be where I am today," he says. "I don't get sad when people overlook me. I don't get angry. I get motivated. Who are they to say who I am or what I can do?"

Some time around 2:30 a.m. last Wednesday, Jodie Meeks calls his father. Orestes is making the 220-mile drive from Knoxville to Norcross after Kentucky's victory over Tennessee, and Meeks wants to make sure Dad isn't dozing off.

"Are you kidding?" Orestes tells his son. "How could I sleep after a game like that? I'm so happy for you."

Success of this magnitude would be exciting for the friends and family of any player. But those closest to Meeks say his character and personality make the last few months even more gratifying.

"It's always nice when good things happen to good people," says Barton, the athletic director. "You won't find one person around here that has a bad word to say about Jodie."



Meeks competes in the slam dunk contest during Kentucky's Midnight Madness at Rupp Arena in Lexington Ky. on Oct. 12, 2007.

(Mark Zerof-US Presswire)

The soft-spoken Meeks isn't flashy. A business major, he carries a 3.1 grade point average and doesn't sport any tattoos. Most of Meeks' off-nights are spent at the movie theater or watching flicks in the room he shares with Patterson.

Within an hour of last week's game, Meeks received approximately 150 text and voice messages – including one from Issel. He responded to each and every person.

"Jodie has always had his head on straight," says Martin, who has since moved on to another high school. "Players are motivated by different things. Some you yell at. Some you ignore.

"With Jodie, I didn't have to scream and yell. I could call him in and talk to him just as normal as I'm talking now. I'd tell him he needed to do this and that, and he'd do it. He didn't need to be pushed or hammered like so many other kids."

Meeks credits his parents for his levelheadedness. Orestes, a sales executive at IBM, and Margaret, a bookkeeper at a middle school, always stressed the importance of working hard and remaining humble.

When Meeks was 10, he and his father were driving home from a little league baseball tournament that ended with him being named most valuable player. Orestes noticed Meeks smiling as he sat in the passenger seat and gawked at his trophy.

"You did really well, son," Orestes told him. "But what you have to understand is that this was your best day, and even on your best day, there are still thousands of kids that are better right now.

"No matter what you achieve, you've got to keep working hard, because there's always someone working harder."

Those words obviously had an effect on Meeks, who continues to draw praise for the energy he brings to practice and for the time he spends on his game when no one else is watching.

Meeks' most noticeable strides involve his long-range shooting.

In high school the chiseled, 204-pound Meeks was so much bigger and stronger than his opponents – Meeks bench pressed 310 pounds as a senior – that he usually scored his points by bulling his way to the basket.

That approach helped Meeks win a state championship as a senior, but it also made college recruiters question whether

he had shooting range to be an elite guard at the next level.

With each game, Meeks continues to bludgeon that theory. He's made 44 percent of his three-pointers, including 10 of 15 against Tennessee, nine of 14 against Appalachian State and eight of 15 against Tennessee State. He's also shooting 91 percent from the free-throw line.

The biggest reason for Meeks' improvement is his flexibility and balance. Instead of adding bulk in the weight room like he did in high school, Meeks spends a large chunk of his workout sessions stretching and doing lunges and aerobic exercises.

"It's made all the difference in the world – and not just in his shooting," Gillispie says. "People want to talk about all the points he's scoring, and they should. But he's in such phenomenal shape that he's affecting the game in all kinds of ways.

"He's like the Energizer Bunny out there. He never stops moving. He goes hard on every single play."

Countless times during the past few days, Patterson has walked into his apartment and found Meeks watching his historic game.

"He's got it on DVD, and he's always got it on," Patterson said. "I don't blame him. I'd watch it, too."

As much as he'd like to repeat the performance, Meeks knows doing so will be next to impossible. Opposing defenses are keying on him more and more, meaning anything less than 100 percent effort could lead to a lackluster game and, more than likely, a Kentucky loss.

"Most teams think that, if they knock off me and Jodie, they'll beat Kentucky," said Patterson, a forward who averages 18.3 points a game. "There's a big X on my back, and Jodie knows there's one on his back, too. There's a lot of pressure on us."

Perhaps even more so for Meeks. Along with being one of the biggest keys to Kentucky's season, last week's 54-point game has turned Meeks into a carnival act. Some people will watch Kentucky to see if the Wildcats can win.

Others might tune in to see how many points Meeks will score.

"It doesn't bother me," Meeks says. "I'm not afraid of failure. It comes with sports and it comes with life. If you don't try, you'll never know what you can do."

Copyright © 2009 Yahoo! Inc. All rights reserved. [Privacy Policy](#) - [Terms of Service](#) - [Copyright/IP Policy](#) - [Help](#) - [Site Map](#)